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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, G/TIP, and DRL

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TAGS: PHUM KCRM KWMN SNAR PGOV SOCI VM CNARC TIP

SUBJECT: An Giang: TIP Problem Depends on Point of View

1. (U) Summary: An Giang local government and mass organization officials do not agree on the seriousness of the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) in their province. Women's Union and the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) officials portray a fairly serious problem while local police say they detect one or two cases a year involving three or four victims each. NGO's have generally depicted An Giang as a TIP hotbed. End Summary.

Criminal Police: TIP not really a problem here

2. (U) Lt. Col. Nguyen Van Minh met poloff, Congen EconJO and FSN at the provincial criminal police office in Long Xuyen to discuss TIP in An Giang province. Lt. Col. Minh said that about 100 criminal police and local officers are specifically responsible for preventing TIP-related crimes in An Giang. According to Lt. Col. Minh there are only about two TIP cases a year, usually involving one, sometimes two traffickers and three or four victims. He added that there might be a few more small-scale traffickers operating in the province, but expressed confidence that police were catching almost all traffickers. He said that traffickers usually trick women into thinking that they can get jobs in Cambodia. As far as police knew, he clarified, only local people were involved in human trafficking. While asserting that the human traffickers were not involved with other illegal activity, he admitted that police did not know about any connections the traffickers might have in Cambodia. Convicted human traffickers receive sentences of ten years or more if the victim is under seventeen, but if not and it is a first offense, the prison sentence is usually only two years, according to Lt. Col. Minh.

3. (U) Provincial police only cooperate with district-level police to investigate traffickers, not with Cambodian authorities or even with GVN border guards. Despite many claims to the contrary, Lt. Col Minh said that An Giang was not being used as a transit route from other provinces to Cambodia. An Giang is also a source of many Vietnamese brides who have gone to Taiwan. Lt. Col. Minh said that police have not investigated these because they are legal marriages.

But there is a drug problem

4. (U) In contrast, Col. Lam Minh Huynh, who said he was in charge of An Giang's counter-narcotics efforts, there is a "complicated" drug problem in the province. (Note: Col. Huynh said that he has attended an ILEA training in Bangkok. End note.) Many young people were addicted and the number was increasing, particularly in rural areas. It was difficult to stop traffickers because the border with Cambodia is relatively open, and if things get too hot on one side, they can cross over easily. Since Thailand began its "crackdown" against drug dealers, things have been getting better in An Giang, although Col. Huynh admitted that he did not know why.

DOLISA: It is hard to tell who has been trafficked

5. (U) Provincial DOLISA Director Nguyen Thi Nga described her department's efforts to prevent TIP and assist victims. She explained that An Giang did not have a mechanism to track the number of TIP victims, but added that the provincial People's Committee decided the problem was sufficiently severe that they held a meeting to coordinate a response to the problem. DOLISA's primary task was to help TIP victims and women who had willingly gone to Cambodia -- and for whatever reason decided to engage in prostitution there -- to reintegrate into the community upon their return. Director Nga indicated that tens of women were involved in DOLISA's programs. However, these programs are open to a variety of women in difficult circumstances, not just TIP victims. (Note: It was not clear whether Director Nga included women who went to Cambodia willingly and were subsequently tricked into prostitution as TIP victims, although this may be considered trafficking under current Vietnamese law. End Note.) She explained that it was difficult to tell who was a TIP victim, because there were women who had gone to Cambodia for legitimate employment or business reasons. Some of them had subsequently fallen on hard times. A few of these may have then been tricked into prostitution and thus become TIP victims, but many had

engaged in prostitution voluntarily. Regardless, as returnees, they were eligible for assistance.

¶6. (U) Without catching the traffickers "redhanded" it was difficult to prove trafficking, she said. Contrary to MPS, Director Nga said that there was considerable cross border TIP in An Giang, mostly involving people lured from other provinces. She added that nine TIP victims have been repatriated through diplomatic channels to Binh Thanh Dong district. Among them were three women who were not from that district or even apparently from An Giang. It was even possible that the three were actually ethnic Vietnamese Cambodian citizens. Per an interministerial agreement Director Nga said, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is attempting to find the families of these women. While the other women are participating in DOLISA reintegration programs, these three are staying in a DOLISA-run social welfare center in Long Xuyen.

¶7. (U) DOLISA is working with a French NGO, Terre des Hommes (TDH), on an anti-TIP program in Binh Thanh Dong and Phu Tan districts called "Women and Child Trafficking Prevention Across the Border" Director Nga said. These are deemed the most vulnerable areas because women there have been tricked. The programs address job creation, hunger alleviation and poverty eradication. Some women have received training in sewing and obtained jobs in garment factories, while 20 others went to Can Tho University to learn advanced agricultural skills that they are teaching to their neighbors. While some of the beneficiaries are returned trafficking victims, others are eligible because they are part of vulnerable groups.

¶8. (U) Director Nga declared that education, not poverty was the main problem behind TIP in An Giang. Most victims had little education and little awareness of TIP. She said victims generally had Grade Five or Six educations, at the most. Higher education levels and more awareness of TIP would be key not only to eliminating TIP, but to eradicating poverty and hunger too.

Women's Union: mass organization makes massive education effort

¶9. (U) Nguyen Ngoc Mai, head of the An Giang provincial Women's Union (WU) delivered a prepared statement about TIP while other senior members of the WU and the provincial Committee on Population, Families, and Children (CPFC) looked on, nodding in agreement. Ms. Mai said that unsettled economic conditions and frequent flooding in An Giang contribute to "social evils" including TIP. Women are "deceived" and "cheated," especially to go to Cambodia. Others claim to be "tricked" into marrying foreigners, especially Taiwanese. When they have been able to return they have said that they were not treated as "wives."

¶10. (U) While the WU has not done research and does not know the number of victims, Ms. Mai said that victims have revealed that women usually cross the Cambodian border "unofficially" with friends who say they can get them a job as a nanny, cafe girl, or maid. Others are similarly tricked to going to cities in Vietnam. Sometimes traffickers invite victims to come with them to "visit family and friends in Cambodia," but deliver them to brothels where they are held against their will instead. Ms. Mai said that not all of the women are tricked into crossing the border or into prostitution, some of them simply have exercised poor judgment, are lazy, or think they can get rich quickly.

¶11. (U) Protecting women and children from "social evils" such as TIP is a "high priority" of the WU, the GVN, and the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), Ms. Mai declared, adding that such ills are bad for "social order, family and spiritual happiness, and are prohibited by the laws of Vietnam." The GVN and mass organizations have targeted lending, housing, employment, agricultural production, and education programs to fight these evils, she noted. The An Giang WU works on step-by-step TIP awareness-raising, especially in remote rural areas where people have little access to print media or even radio and television.

¶12. (U) Ms. Mai explained that with assistance from the national WU, the An Giang WU held nine courses between May 2002 and May 2003 for 470 trainers to raise awareness of TIP. The trainers have focused their efforts in 14 communes. They distributed 57,000 leaflets in these communes and conducted 11,400 meetings with 216,000 An Giang women. They have organized competitions with district-level WU to role-play the negative effects of TIP. A result, Ms. Mai claimed, was to increase an initial set of 134 groups -- comprising 1,461 women who had committed to not allowing their children to become TIP victims -- to 634 groups comprising 9,735 women who have made this commitment.

¶13. (U) The provincial WU gives "direct" assistance to at-risk women, enabling them to enter poverty-reduction programs that have created 5,000 jobs, conducted 18 sewing and other vocational training courses, and led to the creation of 1,130 "loan groups" comprising 18,999 women, according to Ms. Mai.

¶14. (U) Ms. Mai also described a cooperative program the An

Giang Women's Union has been undertaking with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) since 2001 to assist with victim reintegration. One component has been to train 30 WU and CPFC staff members to locate victims -- including those who have returned through unofficial channels -- and help them through the process of reintegration. Female community elders are key to this because their respected community positions allow them to confidentially approach victims who are otherwise unwilling to

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admit that they have been trafficked. First approaches may be through victims' parents, but in other cases the community worker may decide it is best to keep the victim's history from the family. The goal of such intervention is to try to stabilize the victims' lives, according to Ms. Mai. She commented that this may mean helping some victims accept their "difficult lives", and that they must make money "the hard way" as well as manage their own budgets.

15. (U) Comment: The three differing outlooks outlined above say as much about institutional interests as they do about the state of the TIP problem in An Giang. NGOs and IOs active in anti-TIP efforts in Vietnam generally consider An Giang's problem to be relatively serious, but have yet to reliably estimate how large. Provincial authorities did really not shed any light on the scale of the problem either. The stigma victims and near-victims may face, even from an organization such as the WU that is trying to combat TIP, discourages them from coming forward. Less judgmental points of view are becoming more common, sometimes in unexpected quarters, such as DOLISA, and continued cooperation and attention to TIP should produce more productive outlooks and results. PORTER